

Sexual Assault Prevention

Care Provider Bulletin

March 2017



Did you Know?

- More than 90 percent of people with developmental disabilities will experience sexual abuse at some point in their lives; 49 percent will experience 10 or more abusive incidents.
- Almost all abusers are known and trusted by the victim.
- Abusers often have a relationship to the victim specifically related to their disability (residential staff, transportation providers, personal care providers).
- Only 3 percent of sexual abuse cases involving people with developmental disabilities are reported.

Possible Warning Signs

Physical

- Bruises
- Genital discomfort
- Torn or missing clothing
- Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) or unexplained pregnancy
- Changes in continence

Behavioral

- Depression, withdrawal, and/or crying spells
- Avoidance of specific settings or people
- Regression or learning difficulty
- Sleep disturbances
- Poor self-esteem
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Headaches, eating disorders, and/or seizures
- Atypical attachment
- Resistance to exam
- Changes in hygiene



Why are Individuals with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities More Vulnerable to Sexual Assault?

- May not recognize that sexual interaction may be abuse, unusual, or illegal
- May be perceived as an “easy target,” if seen as weak, vulnerable, or less likely to report
- Often isolated and dependent on a small circle of friends or caregivers; these same caregivers are often the abusers
- May have less access to police, advocates, or others who can intervene and help
- Limited communication abilities and/or cognitive disabilities may make reporting difficult
- May be afraid that they will not be believed when they report
- Previous verbal abuse and/or low self-esteem can lead to belief abuse is deserved

Prevention

- Teach the people you support about boundaries and privacy
- Teach and encourage the people you support to speak up and advocate for themselves
- Have contact numbers for law enforcement and other protection agencies visible and accessible
- Ensure employees are trained to report and know that the people you support are trained as well
- Look for ways to increase social supports and contacts outside of paid supports
- Complete background checks for all employees and volunteers who may have any access to vulnerable persons
- Listen to your intuition; if you think something isn't right do something about it! You can check in more regularly, ensure person is not left alone with highly vulnerable people, and/or be clear that you are paying attention
- Teach and encourage appropriate use of emergency services including 911
- Be an advocate who will intervene and help
- Look for ways to increase communication abilities
- Ensure person has independent access to phone and other communication methods
- Take time to check in and ask regularly about the supports the person is receiving and whether they have any concerns so that they know you care and want to hear what is going on
- Ensure the person has opportunities to speak with advocates without staff present
- Promote principles of positive behavior support
- Ensure staff treat people with respect at all times
- Teach and promote skills and competence to increase self-esteem
- Promote person-centered practices
- Promote people-first language
- Ensure plans and language are strength-based rather than deficit-based

Always report suspected sexual assault right away to law enforcement and APS/CPS/CRU.

Take Action if you Suspect Sexual Assault

- **Protect** the person from the alleged perpetrator
- **Report** to law enforcement and the Department of Social and Health Services at 1-866-ENDHARM or 1-866-363-4276
- **Preserve** physical evidence including clothing; physical examination by medical professionals should occur prior to the person bathing or showering

Caregiver Signs

Abusive caregivers may show some of the signs below, but may also show no indication of behavior that occurs when alone with a victim.

- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Devaluing attitudes
- Excessive or inappropriate eroticism
- Isolating / attempting to isolate vulnerable person
- Previous allegations of abuse
- Seeks isolated contact with vulnerable person(s)
- Unresolved history of abuse
- Pornography usage



Sources:

<http://disabilityjustice.org/justice-denied/abuse-and-exploitation/#cite-note-1>

<http://professionaltrainingresourcesinc.com/wp-content/uploads/People-with-Developmental-Disabilities-and-Sexual-Abuse.pdf>

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